Stand on the Sky
by Erin Bow

978-1-4431-6379-8 • HC

About the Book

It goes against all tradition for Aisulu to train an eagle; for among Kazakh nomads, only men can fly eagles. But everything changes when Aisulu discovers her brother, Serik, has a bad limp. His illness could risk not only his future as the family leader, but also his life as well.

When her parents leave to seek a cure for Serik, Aisulu moves in with her aunt and uncle, trying to conceal an eaglet she rescued. When Aisulu is discovered, her uncle decides to undertake the arduous task of training Aisulu to be an eagle hunter so she can compete in the yearly contest. If she wins, the prize money will pay for Serik's cure and save her family from having to abandon their nomadic life.

About the Author

Erin Bow is a former physicist turned poet and writer of novels for young people. Her first novel, *Plain Kate*, won the TD Canadian Children's Literature Award and was nominated for the, CLA Book of the Year for Children Award and the Sunburst Award. She has also written *Sorrow's Knot* and two critically acclaimed science fiction books, *The Scorpion Rules* and *The Swan Riders*. She lives in Kitchener, Ontario, with her husband, author James Bow, and their two daughters. Visit her online at www.erinbow.com.

Pre-reading Activity

Ask students to define drive and ambition. What synonyms could be used to express similar meaning to these terms? After some discussion, read the following from page 152.

> *"I can't do this," she whispered.*
>
> *"You must," said her uncle.*
>
> *"Is must the only word you know?" Aisulu snapped.*
>
> *"The things I have done," said her uncle, "because of must."*

Ask students to relate this dialogue to their discussion about ambition. Then, ask students to write a paragraph about someone they know or a historical figure that has shown ambition. Students should include the person's accomplishments in their paragraph. Have students share their paragraphs in small groups.

Discussion Questions

1. What threatens to separate Aisulu and Serik from each other and their home?
2. Why does Aisulu turn to the Fox Wife for help with the eaglet? How does she help Aisulu?
3. What does the eaglet's name, Toktar, mean? What significance does that name have to Aisulu?
4. On page 96, Aisulu is referred to as "a little wild and a little strange." Why does Aisulu have that reputation in her village?
5. Why does Aisulu feel abandoned by her family? What did Aisulu expect from her family before they left?
6. How is Aisulu changed by her experience with Toktar? How does Toktar show Aisulu that she has changed him?

7. What sacrifice is Abai willing to make to help Serik get well? How does Dulat help his brother make a different decision?

8. In what ways does Toktar communicate with Aisulu? What do his different movements mean? For example, why does Toktar tighten his feathers?

9. Throughout the story, Aisulu talks about taking her heart out of her body and putting it back in. What does she mean by this? How do her brother and Toktar affect her heart?

10. What is Aisulu's biggest fear about training and flying Toktar? How does she overcome her fear?

11. What is Serik's attitude toward his illness and the loss of his leg? How does he adjust to his new lifestyle?

12. How does the title relate to the story? What would you have named the book and why?

Writing and Research Activities

Aisulu and Serik Comparison
Aisulu and Serik have a close relationship in spite of their culture, which assigns different roles to girls and boys. Ask students to draw a Venn diagram and to list the similarities and differences of the two characters' personalities. Working in groups of three, have students write a television interview between an onscreen personality and the two characters. The interview should reveal ideas from the story as well as the different personalities of the two siblings. Each group should practice and present their interview to the class.

Write a Found Poem
Ask students to write a "found" poem. Each student should "find" at least ten phrases or brief excerpts from pages 18-32 that they want to use as a starting point for their found poem. Students can revise and add to their phrases to create a found poem about the harrowing experience Aisulu and Serik have with the eagle. As a class, plan a poetry slam for students to perform their poems for their peers.

Family Relationships
Aisulu and the Fox Wife's relationship changes as the story progresses; even Aisulu and her uncle Dulat come to see each other differently. Ask students to create a timeline of events from the beginning of the story to the end and to focus on key events that help draw Dulat and his wife closer to Aisulu as they learn to trust and love one other. Students should write a description of the relationship at the beginning of the story and show, through the events on the timeline, what their relationship is at the end of the story.

With a Little Help from Our Friends
Many people help Aisulu along her journey to become an eagle hunter. In groups of three, ask students to make a list of the family members and strangers that help her along the way. Ask students to explain how each person helps Aisulu attain her goal of winning. Have students write a paragraph in the first-person voice of each character explaining how that character helps Aisulu. Have an oral reading where the characters share their experiences helping Aisulu.

Model Writing Using Figurative Language
Throughout the book, the author writes beautiful descriptions of people, places, and emotions using similes, metaphors, personification, and other literary devices. Ask students to find a passage they enjoy and to select something in their lives that connects to the description. Then ask students to write about their selection using the author's paragraph as a model. For example, the description of Oraz on pages 245-246 could be used to write about a man they know. Ask students to share their writing with the class.